

Nakusp and Area Development Board Housing Committee Report

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By Laurie Page

Introduction:

Housing is defined as “affordable” when up to 30% of the household income is spent on housing. The term does not discriminate between rented housing and owned housing.

Affordable housing is important to all socio-economic levels and to the fabric of society itself.

When housing is unaffordable for working people, they will find work elsewhere. This can lead to difficulty attracting and keeping skilled workers such as health care providers. It can also make it difficult to maintain a pool of less-skilled workers, in the tourism industry for example. In Nakusp and area, income levels have not increased at the same pace as housing costs. (Household incomes have risen an average of 12% in Nakusp and an average of 5% in area K, while dwelling values have increased by 57% and 39% respectively)

When vacancy rates are close to zero and even the low end of rental rate is \$500, there is not enough available and affordable rental space for people on income assistance or very low employment incomes. People become very vulnerable. This is a health issue as well as a justice issue.

A housing committee under the auspices of Nakusp and Area Development Board was struck on January 22, 2009. Members attending were: Susan Gustafson, Laurie Page, Barb Chwachka, Gloria Kalyn, and Hazel Rossman. People interested who were unable to attend may still join.

What does a Housing Committee do?

Housing organizations take all kinds of different forms and do all kinds of different work depending on the need in their community.

In Nakusp and area, we see the need to:

1) Connect with other housing groups in the region

It's important to know what other groups are doing or have done. There may be opportunities to work together, share resources and ideas. Also housing options in one community often affects the next community, so it is important to keep an eye on what is happening throughout the region.

2) Collect information and report to stakeholders

We will start with information already available, and then have a discussion about performing a survey to collect more data and/or public opinion.

3) Increase public education and awareness

All of the work we do should have some component of public education and awareness, whether it is in the media or reports or public meetings. Without public understanding of the issue, it is difficult to create appropriate strategy.

4) Create strategy that:

- a. Is locally appropriate given the available data
- b. Integrates sensibly with the surrounding region
- c. Takes advantage of opportunity (eg available land, funding)
- d. Builds on Nakusp's OCP and the regional zoning plans
- e. Supports the work of organizations working directly on built housing.

Let's Get Started: short-term priorities

1) Invite George Penfold to present data to stakeholders in Nakusp

George is Selkirk College's "Regional Innovation Research Chair for Rural Economic Development". He compiled some of the data on the CBT's State of the Basin report and has a wealth of information available. He is willing to come to Nakusp some time during the first two weeks of March. This will help us to get a good idea of what information is already available, and inform our next information-collecting steps. (eg, do we want to do a survey, and if so, what information do we want to gather?)

Stakeholders to be invited would include: NADB, Village Council, Paul Peterson, real estate agents, local builders and developers, chamber of commerce, MEIA, Community Services board and staff, Mental Health staff and advocates, plus the people who attended the affordable housing forum in Nakusp or who have expressed an interest.

2) Disseminate the information from George Penfold's presentation

Use the information presented in a report that can be used on its own as support for organizations doing affordable housing projects. Write an article for the newspapers summarizing the information and its application.

3) Organize a meeting around secondary suites

The new OCP allows for secondary suites in residential zones and suites above and behind businesses in commercial zones.

So far, according to Bob LaFleur, only 1 application has been received for a building permit for a secondary suite.

CMHC has a program to fund secondary suite development under certain circumstances. They have offered to come back to Nakusp and talk about it.

We suggest a public meeting that brings together all the information about secondary suites: building codes, bylaws, funding available, financing, landlord/tenant act. If possible, even some discussion about supports for people with mental health issues. This meeting would be geared toward people who are thinking about putting in a secondary suite, as well as people who build or renovate.

4) Disseminate the information about secondary suites

Same thing as 2) above: make a report that is a resource for people, and write an article for the newspapers.